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ABSTRACT

When the learning assistence center's origins and development, beginning with the yen to be scientific and continuing to the rewards of combining technology with humanism, are considered in retrospect, they show the evolution and the revolutionary realignment of many very basic educational concepts. The historical irony of the learning assistance center is that, while it embodies most of the educational philosphies theorized since 1900, it works actively for futuristic education. Its present status reflects the diverse range of its origins and the snowball sequence of its development. The next stage in the history of the learning assistance center may well be its systematic integration into the campus as a whole, with the center taking its rightful place as the support service for the academic community. (Author)

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College Learning Skills: Frontierland

Origins of the Learning Assistance Center

No one is as critically aware of the youthfulness of the Learning Center movement as those caught up in it (22). That the reading or learning practitioner is a forward-thinking zealot thriving on a diet of innovation (36) is illustrated by the theme of this conference, "College Learning Skills - Today and Tomorrowland."

However, before rushing into Tomorrowland, I recommend a stroll through Frontierland. In carving a frontier, as in forging any new field, an interlude for integrating past occurrences, accomplishments and hazards promotes continued, but directed, progress. In the Learning Center movement, where the formalized Learning Assistance Center concept is four years old (19), where 57% of the Learning Centers in the country have become operational since 1970 (21) and where a Learning Assistance Center director is considered a mature practitioner after only four years in the field (40), a glance at where we have been and how we got here is, at least, an antidote for Disneyland and high-speed vertigo.

Using a composite definition of the Learning Assistance Center as a place concerned with learning environment within and without, functio-

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ing primarily to enable students to learn more in less time with greater ease and confidence; offering tutorial help, study aids in the content areas and referrals to other helping agencies; serving as a testing ground for innovative machines, materials, and programs (19:35); and acting as campus ombudsman (39); I reviewed the professional literature for evidence of the early origins of the Learning Assistance Center. Sources included, but were not limited to, ERIC, the Minnesota Retrieval System, NRC Yearbooks, WCRA Proceedings, and nationally disseminated education and media periodicals. Since most articles, monographs and books relevant to College Learning Centers were primarily descriptions and statements rather than research reports, criteria for consideration was unsophisticated and threefold: What was the publication date? Is the program conceptualized or actualized? Are Learning Assistance Center components identifiable?

Categorized by decade, the literature selected falls into four separate periods. If we assume literature records what is happening in the field and if we disregard some overlap, we can discern general trends which characterize each age of development. Seen cynically, the stages might appear cyclical. However, the development of the Learning Assistance Center viewed retrospectively can be considered evolutionary and, in some respects, revolutionary.

Age of Clinical Aspiration: Programs Become Scientific
1916-1940

Early programs and practices in the nineteen twenties and nine-

teen thirties would later become woven into the Learning Assistance Center fabric. The idea that a student could study to become a student can be traced to a study skills guide first published in 1916 (73). Although this guide instructed both high school and college students, a study procedures handbook published in 1929 was addressed to college students exclusively (70). Learning skills covered in these guides include textbook reading, listening and notetaking, studying for and taking exams, concentration and memory (73) study environment and time management, library skills, vocabulary skills, critical thinking, lab procedures and study procedures in the content areas (70).

The issue of a college or university involving itself in an organized effort to save students with less than adequate academic etiquette is alive by the late twenties. Most authors justify the skills programs, noting a student's skill must be learned as a doctor's or lawyer's (14:529), a swimmer's (8:201), or an apprentice's (1:389) skill is learned. One team states that the college study skills course is more of a service to society than to the college and recommends that, if the college can affort to pick and choose, the college should not admit students who are poor risks (33:44,45).

Study skills courses, called "how to study" courses in the late nineteen twenties and thirties, were offered to entering freshmen and to freshmen on probation as ten-week or one-semester orientation courses (14) (8). At the University of Buffalo,beginning in 1926, admission for underachieving high school students was contingent upon successful completion of a three-week summer skills course (33:685). Materials used in the "how to study" classes were assignments from the freshmen courses.

Time management, library skills, outlining, notetaking, studying for tests, and reading efficiency were treated; the format was mainly lecture and discussion. Evaluation was in terms of grades (14) (1) (34), persistence (34), pre/post tests (1), efficiency ratios (number correct/time) (13 (14), and subjective questionnaires (1) (13). By 1934, "how to study" classes were organized as study methods laboratories (8:195).

The need for a more specific, systematic, and scientific approach to study skills instruction surfaced through the "how to study" courses. Reading was singled out as the most important skill (13) and remedial reading was discussed in approving tones as the scientific panacea. A 1927 study (13) and a 1929 survey (52) point out that remedial reading was not a course in itself, but only a topic in a "how to study" course. Of the nine schools out of forty in the United States identifying poor readers, seven included reading in the "how to study" course (52). In his discussion of college remedial reading, Parr pointed to a particularly progressive program which boasted instrumentation and instruction regarding eye movements and vocal processes(52:548). The college adult reading program would develop as the bastard child of the psychology laboratory, where technologically naive reading teachers would go to borrow devices like the tachistoscope (62:190). In this way, the art of study became the science of study. The idea of skills instruction, the relation to professionalism, the need for specificity or treating a problem in small parts, the seductive power of hardware or mobilizing all available resources are concepts which would later reappear in the Learning Assistance Center model.

The Age of Disenchantment: Remedial Reading Is Not The Answer

1940-1950

In the nineteen forties, remedial reading programs gained wide support (5) (66). One survey of California programs reported that 10 out of 22 respondents stated they believed remedial reading should be part of every junior college curriculum, and the remaining 12 did not answer the question (76:195). Courses were held in laboratories instead of classrooms, and programs were characterized by instrumentation (60).

Individualization, though preferred, was dismissed as too expensive (56) (65), but a combination of group and clinical work seemed a fair compromise (65). A program planned at the University of Minnesota provided for diagnosis of reading difficulties. After a remedy was prescribed, outlined, and placed in the student's file, the student would then report for supervised practice by appointment "where it is felt this work can be done more expediently by him alone than in the group" (65:376). When more appropriate, group work was planned.

Weekly individual conferences in a remedial reading course with a ratio of one counseling intern to four reading students afforded a second compromise to total individualization (56). The private conference scheduled for seriously deficient students (66) or for orientating freshmen (1) had been reported in the literature since the thirites, but the Brooklyn College program combined two hours in class with one hour in a regularly scheduled conference (59). Another provision for individual differences was to offer clients three different courses (75) or to give clients the choice between group work or personal counseling (20). Yet, for all the flexibility of the remedial reading and study

skills laboratory courses, only one out of 67 college and university programs claimed to be individualized according to a 1951 survey (5:7).

In addition to the frustrating inability to realize a truly individualized program, the inclusion of upper division students in study methods courses (20) rendered the term "remedial" completely unsatisfactory. At this time the term "developmental" was popularized to mean a higher level reading course, but one author predicted abandonment of both terms (71). Since achieving maximum efficiency was the newly stated goal of the reading and study methods programs, the term "remedial" was deemed inappropriate (75:575), and a "remedial emphasis" was to be avoided at all times (20:121).

A third factor paving the way for the advent of the Learning Center and contributing to the Age of Disenchantment, was the recognition that reading remediation alone was not enough, that other difficulties interfering with student achievement must be treated, and that "if one way of handling the student's problem does not seem to yield results, another way must be attempted" (60:623).

The Age of Integration: Programs Treat The Whole Student
1950-1960

The question receiving attention in the beginning of the nineteen fifties was "Why do study skills reading programs treat only one facet of the student's skills when many factors work together to insure his academic success (60) (41), and when all students do not learn the same way or share the same weaknesses (7)?"

When they reviewed the literature in 1951, Tresselt and Richlin credited only Robinson's program at Ohio with considering both the student's affective side and his academic side. Describing their New York University two-credit "how to study" course, Tresselt stated that of the three variables categorizing students, ability, personality, and study techniques -- personality played the most important role in terms of academic achievement (64). While it was felt study techniques could be handled in the class, more "basic problems" such as personal adjustment were felt best treated in individual interviews. Students enrolled in the University of Michigan's program were screened diagnostically to determine their reading ability, vision, and personality structure; if indicated, referrals to other campus services were also made (61). Personal adjustment and attitude were examples of the "non-writing" areas considered in a remedial writing program (72:291).

In addition to the student's feelings being integrated with his academic performance, his course content was also seen working together as a total learning experience (27) during the Age of Integration. "Reading, writing, speaking and listening are aspects of the single process of communication" (11:165) was the thought of the period and those aspects were integrated into combined communication courses. Though not unopposed (2), "fusion courses" were operating in a large percentage of California remedial reading programs (49).

Administrative diversity resulted from the belief to be inherited later by Learning Assistance Center practitioners that the reading and study skills client needed more alternatives than the tachistoscope and workbook exercises alone could provide. Although Psychology departments, Educational Psychology departments, and English departments admin-

istered programs up to this time, most programs developed under student services (42:2841), and Bamman's survey, published in 1954, showed counseling services leading other departments in administering programs (4:58). That the college reading and study skills program was not becoming just another content course or General Education requirement is seen in the frequent use of the term "service function" in the program descriptions (60) (61:42).

The service orientation of college reading and study skills programs allowed a broad base from which to help students who had multifaceted and interrelating scholastic problems, and the laboratory organization allowed the flexibility needed for individualized endeavors (27) (47). An early form of learning modules (41:23) and the drop-in clinic (60) contributed to meeting the needs of a student viewed as an individual and as a whole. In 1956, a program was outlined which combined lecture/lab sessions with content tutoring, remedial instruction, and individual counseling (12).

Tenets for the nineteen fifties were outlined by Blake: diagnosis individualization, integration, developmental (as opposed to remedial), and "student centered rather than content centered" (11:165). Thus, the schema for skills development was set with students visiting labs on the recommendation of other students (61) and finding a program outlined for their specific needs (65) (11) as academic citizens trying to achieve maximum efficiency (75).

The Age of Actualization: Good Ideas Become Realities

1960-1970

By the nineteen sixties, many of the philosophies and theories that previously could only be lauded (11) could now be realized. Self-

paced, individualized learning became an actuality with the implementation of programmed instruction (54). In 1966, a California junior college survey called for "modern materials" to increase the efficiency of self-instruction (51), but these materials were reportedly being put together at the University of Minnesota since 1958. Raygor wrote that the key to individualizing the University of Minnesota program was the development and availability of self-instructional materials (55:170). The program there was four part; after diagnosis, the student would participate in an interview where he would help determine his schedule and his learning activities. Then the student would work to improve his weak areas in monitored practice sessions. Ideally, evaluation would then follow (55). In two studies comparing methods of course organization, self-paced or programmed courses were shown especially beneficial for the freshman and the upperclassman with lower ability (43) and for the student who might otherwise drop out of a study skills program (45).

Programmed, self-instructional materials allowed the reading and study skills programs to meet the changing needs of their more sophisticated clientele. Graduate students were enrolled in Stanford's program (4) and 44% of the applicants to another program recorded college board scores in the upper half of the distribution of University students (45:88). The subjects in nine out of 22 studies reviewed by Entwistle were "college students" instead of "freshmen" (25).

Another reason individualized instruction became affordable in the nineteen sixties was innovations in the field to be later called Instructional Technology. As early as 1958, instructional television was well received by State University of Iowa students (69). Videotape was incorporated into skills instruction (50) and the computer was put

to work efficiently and humanly (10) (37) (74). From technological modes of thought came the application, in 1967, of the systems approach to reading and study skills programs (74). Systems provided an answer to meeting the student's individual needs since "the strength of learning systems rests in the analysis of alternate pathways through which desired terminal objectives may be obtained." (74:109) Christ 's SR/SE Laboratory was a usable system for learning assistance based on diagnosis, referral, follow-up and modification (18:214) while offering alternatives to students having individual learning styles.

A third way to offer individualization at popular prices appearing in the professional literature at this time was the cheerful exploitation of the paraprofessional (68). With space needed for individual counseling and tutoring and special arrangements needed for learning technology, the laboratory facility was a natural environment. The College Reading Laboratory at the University of Maryland was described in 1966 as having many of the functions to be later considered learning center functions (46): individualized, self-help learning skills assistance for enrolled and college bound students, satellite laboratories, tutoring, and academic aids for assistance in different subject matter areas.

The lab was the stage for the events of the Age of Actualization, and as the term "laboratory" gave way to the term "center" in the late nineteen sixties, a wide diversity of center names developed. The Instructional Resources Services planned for the St. Louis Junior College District consisted of an Instructional Materials Center and a language lab and made the claim that the program was "effective in bringing students up to an acceptable level of performance."(35:13) The Learning Center at Stephens College was designed primarily for convenient hardware sharing (3). The

Fundamentals Learning Laboratories in North Carolina colleges were primarily adult education centers to assist students preparing for high school equivalency exams, but they also served students interested in their own "educational improvement" and students needing academic assistance to complete their college requirements (15:80). The Study Skills Center at Lane Community College was unique in the nineteen sixties because it, like the College Reading Laboratory at the University of Maryland, was not a library-oriented arrangement nor an expanded adult education program. It is described as a programmed materials center supplementing and reinforcing the general curriculum in addition to offering reading and study skills assistance (23). The educational breakthroughs characterizing the Age of Actualization were quickly implemented, and by 1970, at least fifteen different center titles could be found in the literature (3) (15) (17) (23) (26) (29).

The Age of Systematization: The Learning Assistance Center Is Organized

1970-1980

By the nineteen seventies, the confusion of center names mirrors the diversity of center origins and center functions. Many hybrid centers had been developing in semi or total isolation from one another. In 1970, four main center categories of Instructional Materials Center, Reading Laboratory, Study Skills Center, and Audio-tutorial System were determined (17:5-6). Another attempt at categorization in 1975 (21) distinquished between the library type of center which developed in a hopeful effort to reevaluate non-print media and to reembrace the audiovisual department (24) (26) (53), the reading and writing laboratory which was nurtured under the

wing of the English department, and the Learning Center which integrated a wide diversity of functions - all geared to buttressing the student for the academic challenge while dedicating itself to improving higher education (21). The Learning Assistance Center concept, formulated by Frank Christ, is composed of many of the center characteristics organized systematically (19) as one support service (63) honoring the marriage of instruction and technology (38).

Factors influential in the continued growth of the center through the seventies include decelerating enrollments, changes in admissions policies, reinterest in teaching students to learn, endangered financial support and the belief that learning continues beyond formal education (48). The issue of student rights, the more frequent appearance of the non-traditional, non-initiated student, and the conviction that the Learning Assistance Center should be the catalyst for change on college and university campuses (29) (39) led to the center accepting the function of watchdog (57) (16) and nipping the heels of the establishment now and then. On the other hand, the Learning Assistance Center also maintains a wise neutrality on campus: "the resource center does not define the goals of the learning it supports; it accepts the goals of the faculty and the students." (28:5) The development of mini-courses or individual instructional units to supplement regular course content (31) and the insistence on real results from programs that treat personality factors (6) (32) (44) reflect both the Learning Assistance Center's academic ties and the Learning Assistance Center's relation to counseling services in its growth pattern.

The nineteen seventies, the Age of Systematization, would be marked by the coming together of isolated components derived from varying

factors into an organic, responsive and accountable support organization operating out of a facility offering a relaxed ecology - the Learning Assistance Center.

Conclusion

When the Learning Assistance Center's origins and development, beginning with the yen to be scientific and continuing to the rewards of combining technology with humanism, are considered in retrospect, they show the evolution and the revolutionary realignment of many very basic educational concepts. The historical irony of the Learning Assistance Center is that, while it embodies most of the educational philosophies theorized since 1900, it works actively for futuristic education. Its present status reflects the diverse range of its origins and the snowball sequence of its development. The next stage in the history of the Learning Assistance Center may well be its systematic integration into the campus as a whole - taking its rightful place as the support service for the academic community.

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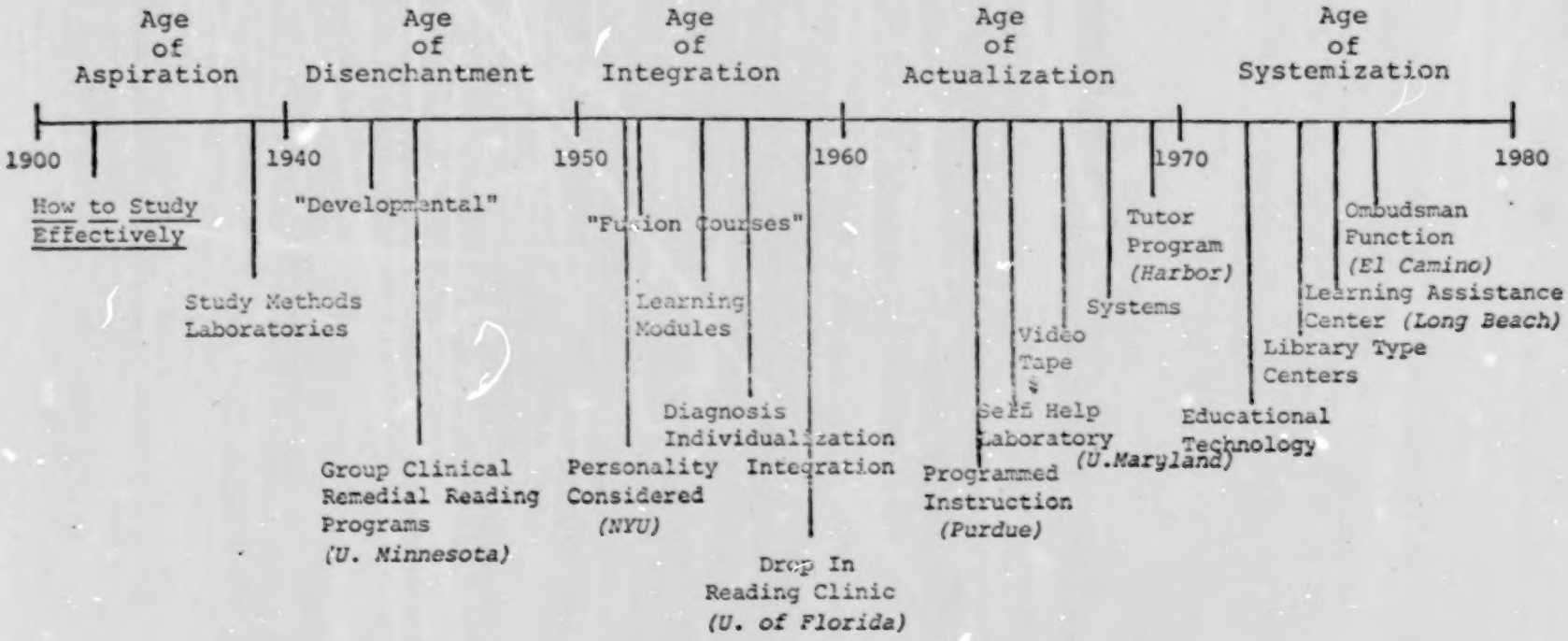
ORIGINS OF THE

LEARNING ASSISTANCE CENTER



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